



Meeting the Needs of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Other Kinship Caregivers

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The Numbers

- In the United States there approximately 2.5 million grandparents who are responsible for meeting the basic needs of their grandchildren.
- Montana ranks 9th in the nation for the increase in number of grandparents raising grandchildren (GRG) between the years of 1990-2000. This is a 53.8% increase.
- Over 6,000 grandparents in Montana are raising grandchildren.

Reasons Why Grandparents Raise Grandchildren

- Parental abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Incarceration
- Parental financial issues, lack of resources
- Divorce
- Death of parent(s)
- Mental or physical health issues
- Abandonment by parent(s)
- Child abuse or neglect
- Teen pregnancy
- Chronic illness
- Military deployment

Montana Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Project

- Started in 2002
- Research
- Programming



Research on Parenting Stress

- 44 grandparents
- 15 Native American
- Grandparents diverse group



Findings from First Study

- As length of time in caregiving role increases, level of stress decreases
- As depression increases, level of stress increases
- As caregiver confidence increases, level of stress decreases

Implications

- Caregiver support groups
- Educational groups
- Mental health support
- Resources



Life History Research

- 26 interviews
- 10 grandfathers; 23 grandmothers
- 18 couples
- Average age 56* (36-71)
- 35% families received assistance
- All but one Caucasian

Reasons for Placements**

- Methamphetamine 44%
- Other drugs/alcohol 32%
- Mental health/other issues 24%
- Social Service involvement 60%
- Teen pregnancy 68%

Grandparent Concerns

- Difficulty finding respite/child care 65%
- Serious retirement concerns 44%
- Forced to quit job to take grandchild 28%



Respite/Child Care

- Can't afford a sitter
- Have daycare – but huge expense
- Cannot find sitters on weekends or evening hours
- We never get to do anything on our own



Retirement Concerns

- Lost wife's retirement/quit job for kids; grandfather working extra hours
- Forced to retire early to take care of kids
- Will need to work until I die
- Was about to retire – now cannot
- Savings are gone, no longer saving for retirement due to extra expenses

Parenting Changes

- Easier to talk to grandkids
- Laugh more; more time to enjoy little things
- Wiser, not as “uptight”
- More knowledgeable, more tolerant of little stuff
- Grandfathers more involved

Intergenerational Ambivalence

- Ambivalence in personal relationships
- Ambivalence in demands or norms
- Ambivalence in intergenerational relationships
 - Due to contradictions

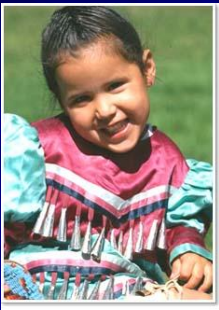
Who IS in our family?

- Do we keep the “family image” ?
- Are we innovative and work toward a new family configuration?
- Are family members in agreement or resistant?

Implications

- Age cohort differences
- Stress levels may be high
- Acknowledge different family structures
- Grandfamilies need to know where resources and support are available

Issues at National Level Mirror those in Montana



Poverty and Lack of Insurance

- Children living with relatives are more likely to:
 - live in poverty as compared to children in parent-headed homes
 - have no health insurance, as compared to children in parent-headed homes
- Grandparent caregivers are 60% more likely to live in poverty than other grandparents

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Financial Assistance

- Potential sources of financial assistance for relatives raising children:
 - Foster Care payments
 - Subsidized Guardianships
 - Adoption Assistance – See: <http://www.nacac.org/adoptionssubsidy/stateprofiles.html>
 - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
 - See: www.aarp.org/quicklink

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Financial Assistance Continued

- Two basic types of grants a relative caregiver can receive under TANF
 - “Child-only” grant: considers only the needs and income of the child
 - “Family” grant: relative caregivers who meet the state’s income criteria can receive a grant that addresses their needs, as well as those of the child

Medical Care



- Difficulty accessing medical, dental, and mental health care
- Difficulty accessing health records

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Medical Consent

- Allows relatives without a legal relationship to access health care on behalf of the child without going to court
- More than half the states have some form of medical consent law that allows caregivers to consent through an affidavit completed under penalty of perjury.
- Montana has such a consent. Grandparent must sign an affidavit.

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Education



- Difficulty enrolling children in school
- Difficulty being included as a participant in the IEP process, parent/teacher conferences etc.

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Educational Consent

- About a quarter of the states have some form of educational consent law that allows relative caregivers without legal relationship to access school enrollment
- In Montana we now have an educational consent law.
- Grandparents must sign an affidavit.

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Montana House Bill 31

- Passed in 2007
- If child “abandoned” to relative parent may not come back and take child away.
 - Child must have lived with relative six months
- 5-day waiting period
- Case is opened with Child and Family Services
- **Are certain restrictions

Care and Custody of Children in Grandfamilies

The Complexity of it All

Various Forms of Care and Custody



- Relative Foster Care
- Legal Custody
- Guardianship
- Adoption
- Informal care
- Power of Attorney

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Relative Foster Care

- One quarter of all children in foster care live with relatives
- Federal law requires states consider giving preference to a relative when placing a child
- Each state has its own eligibility and licensing criteria for placing a child with a relative - See:
http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_02_24_FR_KinshipCare.pdf

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Relative Foster Care Continued

- Relatives licensed as a foster parent for a Title IV-E eligible child must receive same foster care payment as a non-kin foster parent
- Permission needed from children welfare agency needed for routine activities – sleepovers, school pictures, field trips, visits to family reunions

Legal Custody & Guardianship

- Court does not terminate parental rights or responsibilities
- Parents can go back to court and ask that guardianship or legal custody be terminated
- Legal Custody –refers to family or juvenile court
- Guardianship –refers to probate courts and codes
- Best interest of child should govern

Subtypes of Legal Custody and Guardianship

- Standby guardianship – pre-appointed future guardian steps in after triggering event occurs
- Joint guardianship – caregiver shares custody with parent
- Short term guardianship or custody – parent appoints person to have temporary control of child
- De facto custody – child's primary caregiver for some period of time in the parents' absence

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Adoption

- Birth parent must either be proven unfit and parental rights terminated by the court or parent must voluntarily surrender rights before relative can adopt
- Terminates all parental rights and responsibilities, and caregiver becomes "parent" in the eyes of the law
- Some type of open adoption law exists in 30 states to allow post-adoption contact between birth parents & child

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Informal Caregivers



- Many relatives raising children do so "informally" (without a legal relationship)
- Legal process can be emotionally exhausting and damaging to relationships
- Hope that child will ultimately return to parents' care
- Financial drain
- Often means more barriers

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Medical and Educational Consent through "Power of Attorney"

- These are documents that generally confer all powers over the care of a child, with the notable exceptions of the powers to consent to marriage or adoption
- Power of attorneys can generally be designated for six months to a year, so it may not be the best option for long term caregivers
 - Temporary by nature and easily revoked

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Implications for Public Health



- Know where your local services are located to share with grandparents
- Encourage them to sign up for TANF and Medicaid
- Talk to them about SNAP-ED and other food related programs
- Tell them about immunizations through public health and other services
- Refer them to their local Extension office
- Refer them to the Montana GRG Project

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